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P O O R H O U S E S

I N S C O T L A N D

I N R E F E R E N C E T O A

P R O P O S A L T O E S T A B L I S H O N E

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P O O R H O U S E S

I N S C O T L A N D.

LETTER from Mr SWAN, Kelso, to Mr MILNE HOME of
Wedderburn.

KELSO, *2d March* 1868.

SIR,—As one largely interested in the administration of the Poor-law in the county of Berwick, I beg to forward by book-post for your consideration some papers printed for the purpose of inducing the ratepayers to sanction the erection of Poorhouses.—I am, Sir, your very obedient servant,

R. SWAN.

To DAVID MILNE HOME, Esq., of Wedderburn.

PAXTON HOUSE, *25th March* 1868.

DEAR SIR,—Your letter of the 2d instant, accompanied by a printed copy of a 'Report by a Committee of the Parochial Board of Coldstream, on the Proposal to erect a Combination Poorhouse for Berwickshire,' was duly received by me.

I delayed acknowledging your letter, in order to bestow on the Report that consideration due to the importance of the subject, and due also to Mr Shaw of Skaithmoor, who signs the Report, and who is most deservedly respected for his intelligence and sound judgment. And allow me to add that I am glad to see you are chairman of the Parochial Board of Cold-

stream, as, in their deliberations on this important subject, the members will, I am sure, be greatly aided by your long and extensive experience as a land agent in our district.

Having now had time to think over the measure which the Committee have proposed, and which the Parochial Board of Coldstream recommend to be adopted both for its own parish and for the other parishes in Berwickshire, I now offer for your consideration the result of my reflections, hoping that you will pardon the liberty I take in sending my answer to your letter in a printed form. I observe that the Coldstream Parochial Board, at their meeting of 6th February, where you presided,—“with the view of inducing other parishes to join” them in this matter, “directed the Report to be printed and widely circulated.” I learn that accordingly copies of the Report, having prefixed to it the above minute signed by you, have been widely circulated in Berwickshire, and that steps are being now taken to have meetings in the several parishes to consider the Report. As I am a ratepayer in eight parishes of this county, and therefore nominally a member of eight Parochial Boards, I am, as you remark, somewhat interested in the question about to be discussed in these parishes. It has therefore occurred to me that the most convenient, if not the only possible, way of my taking part in the discussion is to print my answer to your letter, and send copies of it to my brother heritors, and my colleagues in the several Boards of which I am a member.

I hope I shall not be chargeable with presumption in thinking that, even in the other parishes of the county, the views which I intend to submit, may be of use.

The whole question of Pauperism, and in particular the plan of maintaining our paupers in Poorhouses, has more than once engaged my attention, and I freely confess that on this point my views have not always been the same. So far back as the year 1841, I had occasion to investigate the pauperism of the county of Berwick, having been appointed by the county magistrates, chairman of a committee with that object. I then concurred with the majority of the committee, and with the almost unanimous opinions of the county magis-

trates, in disapproving of Poorhouses. The subject came again before me in the year 1859, when it was proposed to establish a Poorhouse for the east of Berwickshire, to embrace twelve parishes. I was then more favourable to the proposal, after personally inspecting the Poorhouse at Dalkeith, and obtaining much information from the workhouse of the Glendale Union, in Northumberland, through Dr Turnbull of Coldstream, its medical officer. Several members of the committee then appointed to consider the proposed measure became alarmed lest the Poorhouse should be made an instrument of oppression; and other objections also rose up, which I cannot explain better than by giving the following quotation from a letter addressed to me by an influential member of the committee:—

“The point to which those who desire the introduction of a Poorhouse in this district should turn their attention, as being that which I believe will prove the main obstacle, is the raising of the funds for the erection of the buildings. There is a pretty general opinion among the tenantry of this district that, considering the limited period of their interest in the lands occupied by them, it is not reasonable that they should contribute towards the purchase of ground, or the erection of buildings, which become the permanent property of the landowners.” “Mr ——, while decidedly in favour of Poorhouses, and of the opinion that the presence of one among us would arrest the *increase* of Poor-rates, besides its important social effects, does not think it would *lower* the rates. When one so shrewd as he is has arrived at this conclusion, it is easy to see the objection that is certain to be made to a measure which will involve an immediate considerable addition to the rates, without any very encouraging prospect of such an ultimate counterbalancing reduction as to warrant the outlay.”

The project of a Poorhouse was, in consequence of these objections and difficulties, abandoned. But I am not surprised that, after a lapse of eight years, it should be resumed. Since the year 1859, the assessments for pauperism in our county have increased (including the expenses of management) fully 20 per cent, whilst during the same period the expenditure for

Scotland generally has increased from £657,365 to £807,631, being at the rate of 23 per cent.

The subject is indeed awakening in all quarters the greatest anxiety. There is evidently no limit to the constant increase of the burden. It is becoming most oppressive, especially to the smaller classes of heritors, and creating among them no small dissatisfaction. Among the destitute classes themselves feelings of discontentment are even stronger, so that an alienation of classes is arising, very hurtful to the public interests. But even a worse result has to be told, and that is the loosening of domestic ties, the drying-up of Christian sympathy, the habits of imposition and deception which the system engenders among the working classes of the country.

If these views are not incorrect, there need be little wonder that our system of Poor-laws should be exciting in the minds of many persons gloomy apprehensions, and should be inducing ratepayers in many other districts besides ours, to think of measures which may lessen the burdens weighing upon them.

It is indeed a hopeful sign of the times, that everywhere in Scotland a general unanimity of opinion prevails on this subject. There is a general and ever-increasing dissatisfaction with our whole Poor-law system: and a belief exists that, unless some remedy be speedily adopted, the effects will be disastrous, morally, socially, and economically.

I think that the first note of alarm and warning came from the north. Sir George Sinclair of Ulbster, in the county of Caithness, a resident proprietor, and a man of great intelligence and honesty, published the results of his experience and observation as chairman for twenty-six years of a Parochial Board in a populous parish. A few extracts from his pamphlet I shall give by way of postscript to this letter, showing the evils which he had observed.

From the west of Scotland a remonstrance has more recently come from the Rev. Dr Norman Macleod, who, labouring for many years among the dense population of Glasgow, is well able to pronounce an opinion. In answer to the question,

“How can we best relieve our deserving poor?” he observes that—

“It is a question which presses itself upon us with constant and increasing interest. All acknowledge, that it is not answered by our Poor-law, as at present administered, in any part of the kingdom. The only legal check to imposition or sloth is the workhouse, with its separation of the members of the family, its forced labour, and its diet, in *quantity* only sufficient to support life, and in *quality* not very tempting to a nice appetite.” “The practical difficulties which every form of legal assessment, as at present administered, has to contend against, are on the one hand that of indiscriminate *giving*, so as to pauperise and demoralise the community, and on the other hand that of stern *withholding*, so as to let the poor starve and die.”

From the east of Scotland, still more decided condemnation has come forth. At a public meeting held a few weeks ago in Edinburgh, the Rev. Dr Guthrie, who for so many years has studied the condition of the destitute classes, and done so much for their spiritual and moral benefit, made this emphatic declaration—

“With reference to the present Poor-law, he believed it to be one of the greatest curses that ever fell on this country. It was not only pauperising the people, but it was demoralising them.”

Within these last few days, there has been published a most important ‘Report on the Condition of the Poorer Classes of Edinburgh,’ which contains the following passages:—

“What do we get for the annual expenditure of a sum which now exceeds £800,000? Increased happiness and comfort to the poor? What answer do we get from the back slums of our cities, and the squalid cottages of our manufacturing villages? In what degree has this magnificent expenditure accomplished any good beyond the temporary relief of a class whose pauperism is the result of vice, ignorance, or improvidence? and where is this expenditure to end? The very endeavour to keep it within bounds, is one of the most fruitful sources of its increase! Already the cost of management exceeds £90,000, or more than 11 per cent; and this rate goes on increasing with the erection of every new Poorhouse, and the addition to the staff of officials which then becomes necessary.

“The population of Ireland to that of Scotland is as 5 to 3; and yet the expenditure for Poor-law relief in Scotland is greater than in Ireland!

“In fact, a compulsory system for the relief of the poor, administered chiefly by a salaried agency, is regarded now, by all competent and unbiassed authorities, as having utterly failed.”

“How long is this state of matters to continue? How long are we quietly to submit to a tax so enormous, which but perpetuates and increases the evil it was imposed to relieve?”—(Report, p. 42.)

This Report, drawn up by a committee composed of men of the highest intelligence in the capital of Scotland, and approved of at a public meeting presided over by the Lord Provost, pronounces a condemnation upon our whole Poor-law system, which will be ratified by the general voice of Scotland. Even Mr Walker of Bowland, the talented Secretary of the Board of Supervision, notwithstanding his official position, is obliged to admit that Poor-laws have a tendency

“To *foster pauperism,—increase expenditure* for the relief of the poor,—and *deteriorate the character of the population.*” He adds that the *only* “known check is the system of *Workhouses*, as they are termed in England and Ireland, *Poorhouses* as they are called in Scotland. It must be admitted, it is not a perfect contrivance; nevertheless, being the only method yet devised, capable in any degree, of *stemming the current of deterioration*, it concerns us to ascertain, whether we are better with it than without it. If it has caused any considerable improvement, we must be content to maintain it, till some better expedient is discovered.” *

There is thus, from almost all quarters, evidence of general dissatisfaction and alarm at the progress of pauperism in Scotland. The measures now proposed in our own border counties for arresting the evil arise from a similar feeling:—and if the dangerous character of a disease is generally inferred from the desperate remedy prescribed, and the confession that, should that remedy fail, the disease is incurable, there may well exist the utmost apprehension for the issue.

Mr Walker, it will be observed, speaks in no confident

* ‘The Effects of Poorhouses in Scotland,’ by W. S. Walker, 1864, p. 6.

terms of the Poorhouse system; and he admits that there is no other, which with all his official experience he can think of, likely to stem the evils of pauperism.

Have the hopes which he expressed in 1863, that the Poorhouses then existing and in progress of being erected would have that effect, been realised? At that time twenty-four Poorhouses had been established in Scotland: the number has now increased to sixty. What has been the result? Have these institutions answered Mr Walker's anticipations? Have they succeeded in "stemming in any degree the current of deterioration"? Have they "caused any considerable improvement," as he then hoped they would, and inspired by which hope he advised that they should be maintained and extended? The tables published by the Board of Supervision furnish an emphatic answer. In the year 1863 the Poor-law expenditure amounted to £736,027—in the year 1867 it amounted to £807,631.

I observe, however, that the Coldstream Committee have founded largely on the opinions and hopes which Mr Walker entertained in the year 1863. They make no reference either to the subsequent increase of expenditure which may have induced a change of opinion on his part, or to the opinions which he now actually entertains. Moreover, in quoting at considerable length from that old pamphlet of Mr Walker's, they have apparently overlooked the passages in which, as I have just shown, he gives a very guarded, if not a hesitating, testimony as to the effectiveness of Poorhouses. The Committee appear to have been swayed only by those passages and cases in Mr Walker's pamphlet, which are of different character.

Before commenting on these cases, let me for the sake of distinctness advert to the benefits specified in the Report of the Committee which they expect will be realised by the establishment of a Poorhouse.

"If the Poorhouse is well managed, and the test on imposture which it affords is judiciously and firmly applied, there seems no reason to doubt that the rates will fall instead of rise, while the Poor-law will be more easily administered; and indoor relief being

more public and less palatable than the present system, there will be less temptation to many, to cast away the spirit of manly independence once so characteristic of the Scotch.”—(Report, p. 12.)

Another advantage expected from the proposed measure is pointed out in the following passages:—

“As to persons of migratory habits, a Poorhouse has no great attraction. They have prudence enough to avoid those parishes which have it in their power to offer indoor relief. It seems, from the rapid increase of the number of Poorhouses, that, in self-defence, all our parishes must sooner or later be connected with a Poorhouse. Parishes near the English border have often felt the need of such protection, both against stranger mendicants, and against those who have spent their strength in the south, and only return to the parish of their birth to avoid the hated Workhouse.”

The advantages, then, which the Committee anticipate from a Poorhouse may be summarised thus:—

The rates will fall instead of rise.

The Poor-law will be more easily administered.

There will be less temptation to many to cast away independence.

The parishes will be protected from both stranger mendicants and their own native poor.

Now, what are the proofs relied on by the Committee to show that these anticipations are well founded?

I can see only two—viz., the results effected by establishing a Combination Poorhouse at Kelso, and Mr Walker’s pamphlet of 1863. I confess that to my mind both of these proofs, so far from being decisively favourable to the views of the Committee, appear very conclusive against them.

1st, As to the Kelso Poorhouse.—The tables of paupers and expenditure before and after it was established, which the Committee have been so good as to print, make this point quite clear.

The expenditure in the three years before the Poorhouse was established was (taking the average) £4523; and in the

years 1866-7 (taking the average) £4273. But the sums given in this table were merely the amount of allowances to registered paupers. The Committee in a footnote allow, that to these sums must be added £183 yearly for the cost of building the Poorhouse ; and from another footnote (page 11), it appears that “the establishment charges, for salaries, fire insurance, taxes, repairs, &c., average less than £2 per share,” making a further addition, therefore, of £140 yearly ; so that the poor-rates in Kelso combination now amount to £4596, being £73 more than the rates previous to the erection of the Poorhouse.

If an average of six years were to be taken before the Poorhouse was erected, the cost to the parishes was only £4335 yearly : during the last six years the average is £4765, showing a balance against the Poorhouse system of £430 yearly!

It appears to me, therefore, that these Kelso “statistics” do not justify the anticipation of the Committee, that, should a Poorhouse be established for Berwickshire, “the rates will fall instead of rise.”

I cannot help adding, that it is to be regretted that only one case of an alleged successful Poorhouse should have been brought forward in the Report, when the Committee know that there are altogether sixty Poorhouses in Scotland. It would have been desirable to have had some information regarding the general results of the system, now that it has been so extensively worked. There are Poorhouses at Jedburgh, Gala-shiels, Hawick, Haddingtonshire, Inveresk, Peebles, most or all of which present features quite as “similar to their neighbours in Berwickshire” as the Kelso Poorhouse is alleged to present. One would like to know, whether the expenditure had risen or fallen in the several districts where these Poorhouses were erected ; and it might have been expected that the Committee would, in a matter of so much importance, have extended their inquiries so as to afford this information.

I have no access to know what the expenditure now is in these six neighbouring districts compared with what it used to be before the Poorhouses were erected. But I observe, from

the published volume of the Board of Supervision for 1867, that the average weekly cost of maintaining paupers in these Poorhouses is 5s. 3d. per week, or £13, 13s. yearly; whereas the yearly allowance to paupers, on an average throughout Scotland, is (as the Committee allow) only £5, 18s. 10d.*

2d, As to Mr Walker's pamphlet, written in the year 1863, I admit the value of his opinion, considering his intelligence and experience. The opinion, as expressed in that pamphlet, as I have already shown, was guarded and cautious, as became his official position; and we have no knowledge of what his opinion may now be after four years' more experience.

But Mr Walker's pamphlet contains also valuable statistics regarding the Poorhouses established previous to the date of it, and it would have been well had the Committee attended to these. What do they show?

Mr Walker mentions, in each of the twenty-four cases of Poorhouses then existing in Scotland, the number of the poor, and the amount of expenditure in the parish or district connected with each Poorhouse. In examining these statistics I find, that in fifteen cases, the expenditure was larger after the establishment of the Poorhouse,—in the remaining nine, the expenditure was less. But it must be particularly observed that Mr Walker admits (page 7) “that *the cost of erecting the poorhouses was not included* (by him) *in the expenditure* given in this paper.” If it had been included, of course, instead of only nine cases of success as regards diminished expenditure, the number would have been far less.

I farther find that in seven of these cases out of the nine, the reduction of expenditure was evidently brought about by a large reduction in the number of paupers receiving relief.

In these seven cases, the reduction of the expenditure and

* Since the foregoing paragraph was written, I have met an East Lothian proprietor, who informed me that the Poor-rates in the district where the Poorhouse is established in that county, instead of falling, as had been hoped for, had greatly increased. The Poorhouse was opened in May 1865. The expenditure of the parish of Prestonkirk, in which it is situated, was, on an average of the two previous years, £554, as shown by the Reports of the Board of Supervision. The expenditure in the year 1867 was £636.

the diminution in the number of paupers is shown in the following table:—

	Before Poorhouse opened.		After Poorhouse opened.	
	Expenditure.	Paupers.	Expenditure.	Paupers.
Dumfries, . .	£3602	612	£2478	323
Abbey, . . .	9178	1146	6431	1074
Dalkeith, . .	5176	639	4588	569
Do., . . .	3001	334	2658	291
Hawick, . . .	3623	421	3473	396
Jedburgh, . .	2280	427	1883	204
Kelso, . . .	5992	712	5363	591

I think there can be no doubt, looking to this table and to the reason of the thing, that it was only in consequence of a large reduction in the number of paupers that a diminished expenditure was effected. Where the number of paupers was largely diminished, as in Dumfries and Jedburgh, the reduction of expenditure was considerable; where the reduction in the number of paupers was smallest—viz., at Hawick—the reduction of expenditure was also smallest.

There is, of course, a great addition to the cost of management caused by the building of a Poorhouse, purchasing ground for it, employing a governor, a matron, a porter, and other subordinate officers. This additional expense can be met only by a very large reduction in the number of paupers, to the extent, as shown in the foregoing table, of from 30 to 40 per cent.

This affords an explanation why, according to the Report of the Committee, there was no diminution of expenditure at Kelso, comparing that of the two or three years before the Poorhouse was opened with that of the last two or three years. It will be seen that in the year before the Poorhouse was opened, the number of paupers was 712, whilst in the year 1867 the number was 569, being a reduction of 143, or only 20 per cent.

Therefore, the inference I draw from Mr Walker's pamphlet, which is so much relied on by the Committee, is that the probability of failure or success, as regards a reduction of expenditure, judging from the experiments of Poorhouses then existing, is in the proportion of fifteen to nine;

and if the cost of building the Poorhouses had been included, failure to success would have been very likely as eighteen to six; also, that in the few cases where the Poorhouse system succeeded, it was owing chiefly if not solely to a very large, almost a wholesale, reduction in the number of paupers.

But, perhaps, I may be told that a large reduction in the number of paupers in each parish is precisely what the Committee look forward to. They say that the Poorhouse which they recommend to be erected, is to have "*no great attraction*," even for persons of migratory habits,—that it is to afford "relief more public and *less palatable* than the present system;"—that the Border parishes especially, must, "in self-defence," adopt such a measure both against stranger mendicants "and against those who, after spending their strength in the south, only return to the parish of their birth to avoid *the hated Workhouse*."

In other words, the Poorhouse is to be made as unpalatable, hateful, and repulsive as an English Workhouse, so that paupers scared away from English parishes by the Workhouse, may be deterred from seeking an asylum in their native parishes in Scotland by seeing before them the discipline of a Scotch Poorhouse, and the "*firmness* of Parochial Boards in offering to them only indoor relief in the Poorhouse" (page 6).

Now I freely admit that if this is to be the object for which the proposed Poorhouse is to be erected, and this the way in which the measure is to be worked, the expenditure would be lessened in all our Berwickshire parishes, or, to use the words of the Committee, "the rates will fall instead of rise, while the Poor-law will be more easily administered."

To all and sundry who may apply for relief—if any, knowing what awaited them, did apply—the Inspector would have only to say, "Go to the Poorhouse." There need be no inquiry whether the applicant belonged to the parish, or had relatives bound to give maintenance, or would misspend outdoor relief; for it is now held competent, to insist that all applicants for relief shall receive that relief only in the Poorhouse. In the case of Forsyth, decided by the Court of Session in January 1867, it was observed by the presiding judge that—

“ When the impotent poor are to be maintained, it is as necessary to provide them with a house to live in, as with food and clothing ; and it would be a strange thing *to restrain a Parochial Board from collecting in one house, the poor scattered through the parish.*” “ Is any one of the legal poor entitled, as matter of right, to outdoor relief ? To that question I have no hesitation in giving the answer, *That it is in all cases a legal tender of relief, to offer admission to the Poorhouse.* It has been said that the Workhouse was intended, under the provisions of the 8th and 9th Vict., only for a certain class of poor persons. *That is to me quite a new proposition.*”

The circumstances of the case in which this judgment was pronounced deserve to be noted, not only as showing the legal power possessed by Parochial Boards, but as illustrating the extent to which the power is likely to be used.

The pauper, in the case referred to, had been postmaster in a considerable fishing town, and a shoemaker by trade. Becoming disabled for work, in consequence of scrofula, he applied to the Parochial Board for assistance. He was sixty-five years old. He had no children, but he had an active and industrious wife, who gained some earnings for both her own and her husband's support. The Parochial Board granted an allowance in these circumstances of 2s. per week, which was continued from the year 1853 to the year 1865. In this last year, a Combination Poorhouse was erected in the county, but not in the parish to which the postmaster belonged, and in which parish he had resided all his life. The Parochial Board, having acquired right to send a certain number of paupers to this Poorhouse, intimated to the old postmaster that his weekly allowance of 2s. was to cease, but that he might go to the Poorhouse. The postmaster declined to go, urging that he would have to leave his own cottage, where he lived comfortably enough with the 2s. a-week, and the help he got from his wife and neighbours ; whereas, by going to the Poorhouse, he would be separated from them, and would for his maintenance cost the parish a great deal more than by allowing the outdoor relief to continue.* But the Parochial Board adhered to their

* The expense of maintaining the inmates of the Nairn Combination Poorhouse, which is the one referred to, was on an average 5s. 3½d. in the year 1867,—in the year before, 5s. 7½d.

resolution. They followed Mr Walker's advice to act "*with firmness*;" and they had the cruelty to offer to take the postmaster's wife also into the Poorhouse, though she was not applying for relief,—by way of obviating the objection that husband and wife would be separated, though it was notorious that in a poorhouse the two sexes are always kept separate. The postmaster having had his allowance of 2s. discontinued, in consequence of refusing to go to the Poorhouse, complained to the sheriff. The sheriff sustained the complaint, and ordered the outdoor allowance to be continued. The Parochial Board appealed to the Court of Session. The Court reversed the sheriff's judgment, holding that the Parochial Board were entitled to do as they had done.

Accordingly, the decision referred to is now accepted as settling the question for all Scotland. Mr Guthrie Smith, advocate, in the second edition of his work entitled '*A Digest of the Law of Scotland relating to the Poor*,' published in October 1867, states:—

"When a parish has either a Poorhouse of its own, or an arrangement with another board for the boarding of its paupers in a Poorhouse, the offer of admission therein is all that the pauper can *legally require*." "There is a preamble to section 60 of the Poor-Law Act setting forth the necessity of more effectually administering, by the erection of Poorhouses, to the wants of the aged and other friendless and impotent poor, and those who, from weakness of mind, or by reason of dissipated and imprudent habits, are unable to take care of themselves. But these words are so general, that it is difficult to give them any definite meaning." "Accordingly, in a recent case, the judges did not hesitate to characterise the first six lines of the section as purely '*sentimental matter*,' which had better have been left out; *for the Poorhouse is intended for every person who requires parochial relief*."—(P. 145.)

Therefore the old notion that a Scotch Poorhouse is only for certain classes of poor—viz., the intemperate or profligate, or those who have relatives legally bound and quite able, but unwilling, to support them—turns out to be erroneous. All that the statute suggested on these points, has been declared purely

sentimental, and would have been better left out,—a hint which no doubt Parochial Boards will not be slow to follow.

The old postmaster was not alleged to be intemperate or profligate, or to have relatives bound and able, but unwilling to support him. It was not alleged that his weekly pittance of 2s. was misapplied. Yet he was desired to go to the Poorhouse; and, in consequence of his refusing,—a refusal no doubt anticipated by the Parochial Board, the ratepayers saved, for the future, payment of this weekly allowance.

It is most probable that other paupers in this same district, with which the Nairn Combination Poorhouse is connected, have been served in the same way; for though that Poorhouse contains accommodation for 75 inmates, there were in January 1867 only 25, and in July 1867 only 36 in the house.

However that may be, there can be no doubt that as it is now authoritatively declared to be in the power of Parochial Boards to collect all the paupers whom they are bound to support, of every class, into a Poorhouse; and as they have been told by high official authority, that it is “the only method yet devised, capable in any degree of stemming the current of deterioration,” and “diminishing the expense of providing for the poor,” who can doubt that Parochial Boards will very generally work the Poorhouse system so as to attain these objects?

But the only way in which the system can be worked, so as to lessen the expenditure, is, as I have shown, by reducing to a very large extent the number of paupers at present usually maintained in Scotch parishes. I have shown that unless the numbers be reduced by one-half, or, at all events, more than one-third, there is and can be no sensible reduction of expenditure; and the only way in which such a reduction in the number of paupers can be effected, is making the Poorhouse as repulsive as possible, and stopping all out-door allowances.

If the advice be, as it evidently is, to make the Scotch Poorhouse as detestable as the “hated Workhouse” of English parishes, it may not be altogether out of place to learn from those who are well acquainted with these English workhouses what is their character. No one has visited so many English

workhouses, or has so much attended to the subject of charitable institutions, as Mrs Jameson. In her little work entitled 'Sisters of Charity,' published in 1859, she says:—

"Never did I visit any dungeon, any abode of crime or misery, in any country, which left the same crushing sense of sorrow, indignation, and compassion—almost despair—as some of our English workhouses. Never did I see more clearly what must be the inevitable consequences where the feminine and religious influences are ignored; where what we call charity, is worked by a stern hard machinery; where what we mean for good, is not bestowed, but inflicted on others, in a spirit not pitiful nor merciful, but reluctant and adverse, if not cruel."—(P. 111.)

What says Dr Guthrie on the same subject? He observes, that if the present system of Poor-laws be allowed to continue in Scotland, "the poor themselves will be the heaviest sufferers in the long run. Poor-law Union Workhouses, these great and gloomy prisons, are already rising through the country, to check the evils of the existing system—cold and miserable refuges for such as in former and better days spent the evening of life by the warm fireside of a son or daughter, who, revering their grey hairs, and tenderly ministering to their wants, supported, as nature dictates, and the law of God requires, those in feeble old age, who, in their helpless infancy, had supported them.—('Out of Harness,' p. 93.)

That the representation thus given of workhouses and poorhouses is not exaggerated, is evident from the rules laid down by the Board of Supervision. The inmates of our Poorhouses are by these rules required to go to bed, to rise out of bed, and to have their meals, at certain fixed hours; to wear a particular dress; to see no visitors except by the Governor's permission; to abstain from smoking; and if rules are disobeyed, to undergo punishment. These rules are justified by the Board on this ground, that "a Poorhouse would be useless as a test, or rather it would be no test at all, unless it were conducted under rules and regulations, as to discipline and restraint, so strict, as to render it more irksome than labour (without such discipline and restraint) to those who are truly not fit objects of parochial relief."

Therefore the object in establishing the Poorhouse is, by

means of its discipline and restraint, to make it irksome and repulsive. The more irksome and repulsive it can be made, the fewer will be the paupers who will consent to become inmates; and in this way, no doubt, the expenditure will be lessened. But it is only by the aversion which a severe discipline will instil, that this object can be accomplished, and also by acting on the principle established in the case of the Burghhead postmaster, “that *in all cases* it is a legal tender of relief to offer admission to the Poorhouse.” These are the terms of the judgment—or to quote from Mr Guthrie Smith, “The offer of admission to the Poorhouse is all that the pauper can legally require—*for the Poorhouse is intended for every person, who requires parochial relief.*”

Perhaps it may be hoped, that Parochial Boards will not generally exercise the powers possessed by them. I am not of that opinion. The spirit and motives which actuated the Parochial Board of the County of Nairn in insisting on the old postmaster going into a Combination Poorhouse, and which led them even to come up to the Court of Session in order to obtain that power, and insist on that harsh policy, are very probably possessed by Parochial Boards elsewhere. I believe that there prevails generally throughout the whole country, and especially among the smaller classes of ratepayers, such dissatisfaction with the existing Poor-law, and such dismay at the rapid increase of expenditure, that Parochial Boards generally will exercise all the powers which the law gives—not only to repress the evil, but to destroy that which most people now feel to be the root of the evil—viz., the legal right of the destitute to relief and maintenance. It is now seen that the Poorhouse system can be so worked as, if not to annul that right, at all events to yield it on such conditions as to prevent destitute persons accepting it. It is also known that in other countries, as in France and Belgium, there is no such right of maintenance possessed by destitute persons; and yet that the destitute can be relieved, and in fact are relieved, in a way more acceptable to them, and more creditable to the community, than the way followed among us. I have no doubt that it is a feeling of this kind which has in many cases

already led to the establishment of Poorhouses in Scotland; and when it becomes known that these can be worked in such a way as to deter all classes of paupers from asking relief, and that the chief reason of failure hitherto, is, because the system has not been worked sufficiently on that principle, I very much fear that Poorhouses will be generally used in the same way and for the same purpose as the Combination Poorhouse of Nairn.

Now, if that be a policy likely to be generally followed, two questions arise—*First*, Are the evils of pauperism, either in our county of Berwick, or in the parish of Coldstream, so great as to require such a remedy? *Second*, Can no better remedy be suggested?

1. In answer to this first question, I take leave to say, that except for the parish of Coldstream, I see no necessity at present for adopting a Poorhouse.

The Committee have published a table showing for each of 25 parishes in our county the number of paupers and the amount of expenditure for 21 years. From that table it would appear that, if Coldstream be excluded, the number of paupers in the years 1847-8-9 was on an average 882, whilst in the years 1866 and 1867 there were only 869—being an actual decrease in these 20 years. Now, the population of these parishes is 26,108; so that the proportion in them of paupers to population is only 1 to 30, being exactly the proportion for all Scotland.

The expenditure, however, I admit, has increased. On an average of the years 1866 and 1867, it amounted to £4918, and in the year 1867, to £7049; being at the rate of 43 per cent. This increased expenditure was owing, as we see, not to there being more paupers than formerly, but to the expenses of management being augmented; these expenses consisting of allowances to paupers, medical expenses, law expenses, salaries to inspectors, &c.

In the parish of Coldstream the case is different. There the number of paupers during the last 20 years has not diminished, but increased—viz., from 118 in 1846 and 1847 to 146 in 1867, which is at the rate of 23 per cent. This is the more

remarkable as the population of the parish has during the same period been diminishing.

The expenditure in the three years ending 1848 was on an average, £665; in the years 1866 and 1867 it was £1108—being an increase of no less than 66 per cent!

These facts pretty plainly show where the evil really lies. In the county of Berwick generally, there is no need for a remedy involving a large diminution, if, indeed, any diminution, in the number of paupers. The increased expenditure is attributable to a different cause altogether—viz., to management.

In the parish of Coldstream the proportion of paupers to the population is much greater than in the rest of the county,—viz., 1 to 19 instead of 1 to 30; so that some step I admit ought there to be taken to reduce them, and especially to correct the extravagance of management.

You will thus see, that whatever may be necessary for remedying the evils of pauperism in Coldstream parish, there is not the same necessity for it in the rest of the county.

2. With reference to the second question, whether no better remedy than a Poorhouse can be suggested, even in the case of Coldstream, I would wish you to consider what have probably been the causes which have led to so much increase of pauperism, as regards both numbers and expenditure, in that parish; because it is very possible that some simpler remedy may suggest itself when these causes are known.

Now, I take leave to express a doubt, whether the gentleman who for many years was Inspector, and who resigned his appointment about a year ago, was suited to it. I doubt much that the rector of an academy with a large attendance of scholars, twenty of whom boarded in his house, could look after the poor in a parish so populous and so large in area as Coldstream. Inspectors must by the Poor-Law Act visit at least twice a-year, and oftener if required by the Parochial Board, every person in receipt of parochial relief, at his or her residence, even if such residence be five miles beyond the boundary of the parish. Moreover, when any person applies for relief, the Inspector must investigate the circum-

stances in order to ascertain the parish of settlement, the means possessed by the applicant, and the relatives, if there are any, bound and able to maintain the applicant. I need not, however, enumerate all the out-of-door duties of Inspectors. They are very well known to be extremely numerous and onerous. Nor need I refer to the number of books, registers, and accounts required to be kept by Inspectors ; or to the fearful amount of correspondence carried on with Inspectors of other parishes and with the Board of Supervision ; or to the time occupied in calculating the assessments of the different rate-payers—collecting the assessments, and then dispensing allowances to the paupers, generally in money, but sometimes in goods. Then, besides having the care of the “registered paupers,” an Inspector must look after the “casual poor,” the number of whom in Coldstream parish even exceed the former class. At this fact there need be no wonder, considering that the bridge across the Tweed at Coldstream brings into that town and parish numbers of vagrants, passing between England and Scotland, who are probably never in any other parish of Berwickshire. Accordingly, in the rest of the county the registered poor number 1075,—the casual only 400.

In these circumstances, the Inspector of Coldstream parish ought to have been a person able to devote his whole time to the duties of his office ; and I cannot help saying that it was injudicious to appoint to that office the rector of a numerous-attended academy, who was obliged to be all day teaching in his school, and necessarily much occupied in the evening with his boarders.

What was the consequence ? When the Visiting Officer of the Board of Supervision came to Coldstream, about eighteen months ago, he found that the books, which ought to have been regularly kept by the Inspector, were four years in arrear ; and that the Parochial Board, if they were aware of the fact, had taken no steps to get this neglect corrected. If the Inspector had not time for his indoor duties, he had, of course, still less time for his more laborious outdoor duties. On the discovery being made of this state of things, steps were

immediately taken by the Board of Supervision to recall both the Inspector and the Local Board to a sense of duty. The books were submitted to an official audit, the result of which was to show that the Inspector had habitually neglected to keep them as they should have been, and that he had to account for a considerable sum; which sum, however, he immediately paid up, so that the parish sustained no loss—at least in a pecuniary form.

It gives me much pain to allude to these circumstances. For the gentleman who was then Inspector, I have a great respect,—being a most superior teacher, and a very excellent conscientious man. It was not unnatural that he should have accepted an office so long held by his father, and that he should have hoped that he would be able to discharge the duties of it with the same success. But his father whilst Inspector, had advantages of a peculiar kind; inasmuch as the Chairman of the Board at that time was the Rev. Mr Goldie, minister of the parish, a person of great energy and intelligence. Shortly after the appointment of the late Inspector, Mr Goldie died. His successor, as Chairman of the Board, was unfortunately subject to bad health, so that he was unable to render the same assistance to the Inspector, as had been rendered by his predecessor.

These circumstances, it appears to me, sufficiently explain the anomalous position in which Coldstream parish stands, when the numbers of its paupers and its expenses of management are compared with those of other parishes in the county.

I think that the view I have taken of this matter receives confirmation from the fact, that when last year a new Inspector was appointed, the person selected was required to devote the whole of his time to the duties of his office, being prohibited taking any other work, and, of course, receiving a much higher salary than his predecessor. The fact of his having served previously as a police sergent, probably, in the opinion of many persons, fitted him the more for the work he had to do.

I presume, from the circumstance of your signing the minute of the Parochial Board meeting, held on the 6th February last,

as Chairman, that there has been also a change in this office ; and we all know what important service can be rendered in the general management by an energetic, intelligent, and experienced chairman.

There has not yet been time to see the results of the complete change which has thus taken place at Coldstream. Of course, any very sudden change is not to be expected. But I shall be much surprised if, in the course of a few years, both the numbers of the paupers and the expenses of management do not fall to their normal proportions.

I therefore venture to submit, that there is no need, even in the case of Coldstream, and still less in any of the other parishes, to resort to the expensive, desperate, and doubtful remedy of a Poorhouse. All that seems necessary is to have efficient and vigilant Inspectors, aided by a Board, having an intelligent and energetic chairman at its head.

Here I might stop, having, as it appears to me, stated how what is needed may be attained otherwise than by a Poorhouse.

But whilst you and I are thus discussing the propriety of remedying local evils, it is scarcely possible for either of us to shut our eyes to the larger aspects of the question which this discussion suggests. You, perhaps, may not agree with me, that a more vigilant management in Coldstream parish will do all that is necessary ; or that we should be content to leave things as they are in the other parishes, though there is no increase, and, on the contrary, a decrease of pauperism in them. The expenses of management are, even in them, yearly augmenting, and you may possibly share the views which many others entertain, that, some strong remedy being necessary, applicable to the whole country, the Poorhouse system will have to be generally adopted, in pursuance of the opinion expressed by Mr Walker, that though not a perfect contrivance, it is the only method yet devised, capable in any degree of stemming the current.

Now, before this view be adopted, it would be well to consider the consequences which must result were this system to be generally adopted, and to be worked in such

a way as it must be worked, in order to produce any sensible effect.

If the Poorhouse is to be made so unpalatable and repulsive as to scare away large numbers of destitute persons who now obtain parochial relief, the first consequence will be an increase of beggars. The *paupers* will diminish in numbers, but the *poor* will not ; on the contrary, they will increase, and to an extent repugnant to the feelings of the community.

But I doubt whether this consequence would last long. Christian charity in this country has been considerably blighted under the operation of a Poor-law which enables and even tempts people to say—"Go to the Inspector ; *he* will look after you." On this point Dr Chalmers took a similar view :—

"Even though the discipline of a workhouse should be assimilated to the discipline of a gaol, we fear that, like many other legal scarecrows, its only reaction would be in working down the taste and character of the people to its own standard. In proportion as the law multiplied its severities, would pauperism acquire a stouter stomach for the digestion of them ; and those regulations which at first might deter, will at length be got over, because of a now fiercer, hardier, and more resolute population. They may expel some of those who are of a better and finer temperament ; but in by far the greater number of instances will they blunt the delicacies which are thus handled so rudely. After a temporary subsidence of pauperism from this cause, there will be a reflux of it in its old force and abundance ; and worse than the heavy expenditure which it brings back, shall we behold throughout the country a deteriorated *morale*, the hard-favoured aspect of a more sullen and impracticable population." —Chalmers's Works, vol. xv. p. 173.

There is another evil of a Poorhouse which must not be lost sight of, arising from its prominent and conspicuous appearance. It will be looked on as a public and authoritative notice or advertisement to the working and middle classes, that an asylum at the public expense has been provided both for themselves and their relatives. It has been often remarked that Foundling Hospitals have a bad moral effect, not only by affording a refuge to both mother and child, but by keeping their object and use prominently before the public eye. Poor-

houses are already doing much evil in that respect, by removing obstacles and inconveniences the prospect of which has often a wholesome and restraining effect. They also lessen the inducement on the part of children to look after their aged parents, the former being constantly reminded by the sight of the building—especially if its external aspect be not forbidding—that they have no need to provide for them either shelter or support.

Eventually, therefore, I believe that a Poorhouse would only deteriorate still more the character and morality of the population, without giving to the country that relief from burdens which was expected. But deterioration of character and habits would probably not be the only effect. Is there not a risk of causing much bitterness and irritated feeling among the working classes, by subjecting them to the treatment of the Poorhouse system? If a right of maintenance is given by the law and constitution to those who are destitute, are we entitled to annul or neutralise that right, by annexing to it conditions which render it worthless? On this point also I find myself supported by Dr Chalmers.

“The workhouse” (he says) “is often employed as a scarecrow, by which to distance or deter applications. Is this fair treatment of a people?—first, to instil into them the imagination of a right to subsistence, and then to counteract this, by associating terror or disgrace with the possession of it? Does not the very necessity of thus assimilating an eleemosynary house to a bridewell, prove that there is a fundamental error in the whole system? Would it not be better if, instead of first giving a wrong impulse, and then devising a force of resistance by which to neutralise it, that both the one and the other were dispensed with? or, in other words, instead of first granting a right, and then guarding against it by the severities of a prison discipline, that both the grant and the guard were withdrawn? or, in other words, that the Legislature would disincumber the land at once from the invasion which itself hath made, and the defence which itself hath provided.”—Chalmers’s Works, vol. xv. p. 167.

This is a point which appears to me not undeserving of consideration. Desirable as it is to lessen the burdens of pauperism, let this not be done in a way not only to deteriorate the

character of our people, but to inspire them with a very bitter feeling against the higher classes. I consider that the system by which hitherto relief has been administered in this country, through salaried officials and the machinery of a Board, is bad enough. But the Poorhouse system, if worked in the only way to render it effectual in reducing the expenditure, would be ten times worse, having the effect of separating husband and wife, parents and children, taking the people from their homes, and thrusting them out of sight into what is little better than a prison, there to starve on a miserable diet till they die! Devoid as has been our Poor-law administration hitherto of all Christian principle, or even the ordinary sympathies of humanity, it would become still more execrable, and still more hazardous, were the system of Poorhouses to be adopted as seems now to be proposed.

I therefore would respectfully urge these views on your consideration, as an additional argument to deter from the establishment of a Poorhouse in our county.

Perhaps it would be out of place in this letter to go more deeply into the difficult question of pauperism. But it is quite evident that a crisis is approaching, from two several causes. One of these is, the general and strong feeling of dissatisfaction in the country with the present Poor-law administration. The other is, the complex and ponderous machinery which prevents it working with efficiency. The duties of Inspectors, and also of Parochial Boards, are now becoming so numerous, so difficult, and so onerous, that I am not in the least surprised that there are many parishes in Scotland in which it is not possible to find persons who are willing or suited to discharge these duties. What has occurred in Coldstream parish, I have no doubt has occurred in hundreds of other parishes; and the very fact of it not having been possible to find a gentleman resident in the parish of Coldstream willing and suited to undertake the office of Chairman of the Parochial Board, which you so worthily, and will, I have no doubt, so efficiently fill, is an illustration of the remark. I believe that it is owing to the complexity and number of the duties now imposed on both Inspectors and Parochial Boards, that the management expenses

are everywhere increasing at a fearful rate. In a short time the whole system of Poor-law administration will, from this cause, crumble to pieces under its own weight.

From these two causes I anticipate, before long, that some great reforms will have to be resorted to; and in the prospect of these it would surely be inexpedient to resort to a measure which would involve a large immediate outlay,—which is doubtful in regard to its affording the pecuniary relief expected, and which would be very likely to add to the general demoralisation and discontentment of the classes affected by it.

Let me, however, add a few words on one point, to prevent misconception. In objecting to a Poorhouse for the county of Berwick, and even for the parish of Coldstream, I assume that it would possess the character which the Committee in their Report assign to it, when they say it would be not “*palatable*” to the poor, and would afford protection against those who “to avoid the *hated* Workhouse” of England, return to their native parishes in Scotland. That object can be effected only by making our Poorhouse as hateful as the English Workhouse. Moreover, the Committee have declared that it is their intention, by means of the Poorhouse, to make the “Poor-rates *fall* instead of *rise*.” But this effect can be accomplished only by largely reducing the numbers of the paupers; and to produce this effect, the Poorhouse must be made of a repulsive and deterrent character.

I would not object to such a Poorhouse were it employed only as an abode for the undeserving poor—viz., those who, from possessing vicious habits, misspend the parish allowance; or those who, having relatives well able to support them, receive from them no assistance. For these classes it is quite right that a Poorhouse should be established, with all the discipline, irksomeness, and poverty of diet which is fitted for vagabonds. Such was the character of the old Scotch Correction-houses.

But I most emphatically object to the consignment to the same building, or to any similar institution, of the deserving poor—viz., those who have become unable to maintain themselves in consequence of disease, or of fracture of limbs, and,

perhaps, of old age. To a Parochial Hospital I make no objections; and I think that no harm would ensue from affording to its inmates every possible comfort.

But it seems to me quite impossible to combine in one building the deserving poor and the undeserving poor, without confounding the innocent and the guilty, and without exposing the former to such treatment as is both unnecessary and inhumane.

It is only because looking to the object of the Committee in proposing a Poorhouse—viz., a reduction of the rates—and looking to the extensive powers now possessed by Parochial Boards, that I dread the establishment of a Poorhouse, and I do so on account of the cruelty and oppression to which the deserving poor, who form nine-tenths of our Berwickshire paupers, would be thereby subjected.

I remain,

Dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

DAVID MILNE HOME.

To ROBERT SWAN, Esq.,

Writer,

KELSO.

A P P E N D I X.

EXTRACTS FROM 'OBSERVATIONS ON THE NEW SCOTTISH
POOR-LAW,' BY SIR GEORGE SINCLAIR OF ULBSTER,
BART.

“The greatest evil introduced by the present iniquitous and disastrous system, is the decay of that mutual affection which ought to subsist between parents and their children. I have seen many instances in which persons who formerly supported their aged parents, not only without a murmur, but with cheerfulness, and who regarded the duty as a privilege rather than a burden, come forward and claim an allowance from the parish in behalf of the very parents whom they had been maintaining for years. Young men who would either have remained at home to aid them, or would have remitted money for their support from a distance, now leave them penniless and forlorn, having left the country for the express purpose of getting rid of this sacred obligation ; and it is altogether vain for the parish to have legal recourse on them”—(page 6).

“The assessment has in a great measure laid an arrest on all acts of kindness, and chilled the genial and Christian emotions of the soul. The poor are now coldly referred to the Inspector. Moreover, the assessment is so distasteful to the feelings of the rate-payers in the humbler classes, and so repugnant to their habits, that they show as great unwillingness to contribute a few shillings to the general fund, as they would feel satisfaction in expending ten times the amount for the relief of distress when applied at their own discretion. I might mention cases in which individuals who supported one or more of their own relatives, in whole or in part, under the old system, have come forward and declared, that being now compelled to pay towards maintaining the thriftless and profligate, as

well as persons of better character whose connections were quite able to support them, they were resolved, by way of compensation, to throw upon 'the public' their own relatives, whom they would otherwise have continued to support"—(page 12).

"The Poor-law may be regarded as an enormous and annually-increasing avalanche, which, if allowed to gain strength, will at length burst every barrier, and annihilate the moral welfare and economical prosperity of Scotland"—(page 20).

"I think I may fairly lay claim to some acquaintance with this subject, as I have (for the last twenty-six years) employed no small portion of my time, and of my means also, in endeavouring to relieve the sufferings and promote the comfort of the indigent who dwell around me. I have resided here (Thurso) without intermission since the Poor-law came into operation, and have, as Chairman, attended every meeting of the Parochial Board, and watched the working of the new system with great attention and anxiety. I was myself not hostile to the assessment principle, for although impressed with a deep sense of the evils to which it was likely to give rise, I hoped they might be in some measure counterbalanced by concomitant advantages which its advocates had taught us to expect"—(page 5).

"I am of opinion that Scotland can be saved from *ruin*, both morally and economically, only by abrogating the right of the pauper to obtain relief, while leaving to every parish authority to raise an assessment (when they deem such a plan indispensable), and giving to the ratepayers the unfettered right of laying out their own money in their own way, without control or interference by any other person. Unless such a measure be speedily adopted, Scotland will ere long be reduced to the condition of distress or despair which is now overwhelming Ireland, and to which some districts in Scotland are already beginning to approximate"—(page 6).

